



CITY of NORTHAMPTON ***PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT***

Public Health Director ~ Merridith O'Leary
Municipal Building ~ 212 Main Street ~ Northampton, MA 01060
Phone (413)587-1215 ~ Fax (413)587-1221
<http://www.northamptonma.gov/245/Health>

For Immediate Release - July 23rd, 2021

Northampton Health Department Responds to Increase in COVID-19 Cases

In recent weeks, COVID-19 cases have increased remarkably at a national and global level, and have begun to increase again here in Massachusetts. There are a few major contributing factors to this recent rise in COVID-19 cases.

First, the Delta variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 is markedly more contagious than other variants and it is spreading quickly as a result. Even though there is no conclusive data that points to significantly increased severity of infection or decreased susceptibility to vaccines and existing treatments, increased transmissibility translates to an increase in the number of infections. This alone could again overwhelm our healthcare system, and in many parts of the country and the world this is already happening.

Second, most sectors of our communities have now opened back up without many restrictions. People have returned to visiting indoor settings, traveling, and interacting with many more individuals who live outside of their own home. In general, we know that this can contribute greatly to the increased circulation of many communicable diseases, not just COVID-19.

Additionally, while many individual people are vaccinated, vaccination coverage is unfortunately not widespread or consistent enough across local communities, the country, or the world. In the context of public health and achieving community-level or "herd" immunity, we are only as well-protected as our most vulnerable populations. The inconsistent vaccine coverage is a product of lack of availability of vaccine in many areas and countries, vaccine hesitancy, and the ineligibility of younger age groups to be vaccinated.

Vaccines are the most powerful tool we have to control the spread of COVID-19. They are excellent at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death from COVID-19. Vaccine breakthrough cases occur in people who are fully vaccinated, meaning that at least two weeks have passed since the final dose of vaccination. Vaccines cannot promise to eliminate the risk of infection entirely, and breakthrough cases are expected. However, people who are fully vaccinated generally have minor or no symptoms, and do not typically end up in hospital. Breakthrough cases are monitored by public health in an effort to quickly identify unexpected trends in these cases, such as an abnormal level of severe illness, hospitalization, and deaths among identified breakthrough cases.

The Northampton Health Department is operating vaccination clinics regularly. We accept appointments and walk-ups at our clinics, which currently take place on Wednesdays and Thursdays. On Wednesdays, we are in Pulaski Park on Main Street in Northampton, from 9am to 12pm. On Thursdays, we are in the Municipal Building City Council Chambers from 10am to 1pm, and we are outside in front of Northampton High School from 3pm to 6pm. We offer both the Pfizer vaccine and the Janssen (J&J) vaccine. More detailed information about our clinics can be found on our website.

For the time being, public health regulations and guidelines have not changed. Regardless of vaccination status, everyone should stay home and seek testing when ill. Face coverings are optional in most public settings with certain exceptions, such as healthcare settings, public transportation, and businesses with specific requirements. It is highly recommended that individuals who are not fully vaccinated wear face coverings in public spaces and around individuals who are at high risk for severe illness. People who are immunocompromised or at otherwise high risk may want to consult with their healthcare provider, and some may choose to continue to wear masks and keep their social circles smaller, even if fully vaccinated.

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccines and current public health regulations and guidelines surrounding COVID-19, please contact the Northampton Health Department at 413-587-1214 or at healthdept@northamptonma.gov.